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## Теории институциональных заимствований и изучение инноваций в государственной электоральной политике

#### Николай Владимирович Гришин

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, г. Санкт-Петербург, Россия nvgrishin@mail.ru; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются методологические возможности теорий институционального заимствования (в частности, импорта и трансплантации институтов) в области изучения инноваций в государственной электоральной политике. Выявлены ограничения для применения теорий диффузии инноваций и диффузии политики для изучения распространения государственных институтов. Ограничением в использовании отдельных теорий является их принципиальная направленность на рассмотрение процессов в частном секторе, отрицание субъектности государства и государственных интересов, методологическая зависимость от теории рационального выбора. Раскрыт вклад российского институционализма в теорию трансплантации институтов и ее приспособление для изучения государственной политики по заимствованию институтов. В статье сформулированы предложения по дополнению теорий институционального заимствования в части государственных решений по обеспечению адаптации институтов. Определены возможности отдельных концептов в рамках теорий институиионального заимствования для интерпретации uобъяснения международного распространения электоральных инноваций.

**Ключевые слова**: инновации, институциональные заимствования, импорт институтов, трансплантация институтов, электоральная политика, государственная электоральная политика, электоральные инновации

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Research article

# Theories of institutional borrowings and the study of innovations in state electoral policy

Nikolai V. Grishin

Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia nvgrishin@mail.ru; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581

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Abstract. The article examines the methodological possibilities of theories of institutional borrowing (in particular, import and transplantation of institutions) in the field of studying innovations in electoral governance. Limitations are identified for applying the diffusion of innovation theory and theory of policy diffusion to study the spreading of state institutions. A limitation in the use of particular theories is their fundamental focus on considering processes in the private sector, denial of the agency of state, denial of state interests, and methodological dependence on the theory of rational choice. The contribution of Russian institutionalism to the theory of transplantation of institutions and its adaptation to the study of state policy on borrowing institutions is revealed. The article formulates proposals for supplementing theories of institutional borrowing in terms of governmental decisions to ensure the adaptation of institutions. The possibilities of particular concepts within the theories of institutional borrowing for interpreting and explaining the processes of international spread of electoral innovations are determined.

**Keywords:** innovations, institutional borrowing, import of institutions, transplantation of institutions, electoral politics, electoral governance, electoral innovations

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**Introduction.** The study of innovations in state electoral policy (electoral innovations) has become one of the new research areas in modern science. The research area is at the intersection of such separate fields as the theory of innovation diffusion, innovations in public administration and state electoral policy. Since 2024, the first special project in world science on this issue has been implemented on the basis of St. Petersburg State University - "Innovation Management in State Electoral Policy" (N.V. Grishin, N.A. Baranov, D.A. Budko, N.A. Antyushin).

Materials and research merhods. One of the important tasks is to assess the applicability of specific theories of the emergence and spread of innovations to the study of the processes of creation and spread of electoral institutions. In modern science, there is already experience in applying the theory of diffusion of innovations to study the spread of individual electoral institutions. In particular, theories of diffusion of innovations were used to study the spread of electronic voting by American authors [1], South African [2], European [3], and Indonesian [4]. Potentially interesting and promising for the study of electoral innovations are the theories of institutional borrowing that emerged at the end of the 20th century. Theories of institutional borrowing were developed within the framework of new institutionalism and are presented in several modifications, including import and transplantation of institutions. These theories have gained particular popularity in modern Russian institutionalism [5].

The objective of this article is to assess the methodological potential of institutional borrowing theories for studying the spread of innovations in public electoral policy.

Resarch results and their discussion. The main problems of development of the theory of import of institutions. In the mid- 20th century, the leading theory for explaining the process of international spread of innovations was the theory of diffusion of innovations. It was further developed in institutional studies. The connection was reflected even in terminology – the term "diffusion" in relation to the spread of institutions was used by the leaders of the new institutionalism Walter Powell, Paul DiMaggio and John Meyer, the most influential representative of neoliberal institutionalism in the theory of international relations Robert Keohane, etc. In general, for the new institutionalism, when studying the core theme of institutional change, the specific aspects of this process were more interesting, in connection with which such terms as "institutional borrowing", "transplantation of institutions", "import of institutions", etc. became widespread.

The term "institutional transplantation" was first used in the early 1970s by Paul Singh [6], John Beckstrom [7] and Alan Watson [8] (these authors cited works on the "reception of law" as their previous studies). In a broader context, as applied to political analysis and within the framework of modern institutionalism, this concept was introduced in 1999 by the Dutch scholar Martin de Jong [9], after the works of the leader of the new institutionalism, Douglass North, had already covered issues of inter-country borrowing of institutions, the replacement of ineffective institutions by lagging countries with more progressive institutions.

One of the obstacles to the rapprochement of the theory of diffusion of innovations and new institutionalism was a methodological problem: the theory of diffusion of innovations was entirely based on the theory of rational choice, while new institutionalism sought a more balanced position. But this obstacle turned out to be ephemeral: ultimately, the theoretical constructions of new institutionalism on the issues of the spread and borrowing of institutions also to a decisive extent proceed from the logic of rational choice. At the present stage, it can be asserted that the convergence of theories has taken place: the majority of researchers, both in Russia and abroad, who study the problem of the spread of institutions, openly combine these theoretical sources together.

The topic of the spread and borrowing of institutions has attracted particular interest from Russian scientists since the beginning of the 21st century. Russian scientists have made a significant contribution to the development of individual topics and problems that have remained in the shadow of attention in Western science.

The Role of Non-State Actors in the Process of Spreading Electoral Innovations. Rational choice theory, the logic that underlies both the theory of diffusion of innovations and theories of institutional borrowing, offers some insight into who acts and why actions are taken. We need to find out how promising this approach is for studying the process of diffusion of electoral innovations.

The true subject of action within the framework of these theories is considered to be individuals, private persons who are focused only on their private interests. This is a serious problem for the application of these theories for the purpose of analyzing the spread of innovations in state electoral policy. Despite the development of public choice theory, within the framework of this theoretical tradition, the existence of not only state but even group interests is questioned. This attitude can be compared with the position of some economists in relation to corporations, which are said to be unable to express interests that would not be the result of the individual interests of their participants. Unlike the systems approach, the emergence effect is not recognized. As Rostislav Kapelyushnikov noted, in particular, "discussions about the "target function of a firm" or "social responsibility of corporations" are, strictly speaking, pointless" [10]. Group interests, including the interests of political parties in relation to specific electoral institutions, should be considered here as the result of the calculation of the interests of individuals. In this perspective, one can examine the actions of political parties and politicians who advocate the introduction of electoral innovations that increase their political representation or control over the electoral process. The actions of members of political parties who support an innovation that expands their party's representation will be considered rational here, because this will also expand their personal career opportunities. In this vein, one can consider, for example, the long struggle for the introduction of the institution of electoral commissions, which was waged by opposition political parties in some African countries [11].

The limitations of rational choice theory in explaining the behavior of individuals who support certain electoral institutions are evident. In many cases, the main supporters of electoral reforms are not so much professional politicians interested in expanding their career opportunities, but rather civil activists, driven by value-based and ideological motives. Among the most striking examples here are the public initiatives in Switzerland during the transition to a proportional electoral system at the beginning of the 20th century, and in New Zealand during the transition to a mixed linked electoral system in 1993; in these cases, innovations were

introduced on the initiative of the non-partisan public, despite the opposition of the leading political parties.

Another obstacle to the application of theories of import of institutions is related to the state-legal nature of the institutions under consideration. The theory of diffusion of innovations and theories of institutional borrowing are focused, first of all, on the consideration of those institutions that entrepreneurs or individuals could not only support, but also independently reproduce in their practice. It is known that Everett Rogers, a classic of the theory of diffusion of innovations, assumed the use of his approach only in relation to non-political institutions. But many institutions of state electoral policy (such as institutions of electoral management, including the institution of the electoral commission) are purely state; even at an early stage of their history, they cannot exist as private institutions. The history of their emergence and spread cannot be considered in the context of their preliminary testing by individuals and groups. Thus, the concept of a market of competing institutions is not applicable to the study of these institutions, since, according to its logic, the main subjects of this market are individuals who choose and directly apply in practice institutions that are beneficial to them. Examples of institutions of electoral politics, the existence of which can be supported by private individuals without state participation, are few, but they do exist. Thus, the institution of domestic nonpartisan election observation emerged in 1983 in the Philippines, when the public organization National Movement of Citizens for Free Elections (NAMFREL) was created. After this institution had spread across countries and continents for ten years, states began to legalize and regulate it.

The State as a Rational Actor. The principle of methodological individualism underlies the theory of rational choice and blocks the possibility of considering the state as an independent subject. This methodological approach is quite consistent with modern Western social science, but contradicts the domestic tradition, which seeks to focus attention on the state interest and, when studying issues of public administration, tends to consider the state itself as a subject rather than the ruling elite.

In Western political science, since the mid- 20th century, attempts have been made to overcome the initial subjectivist limitations of rational choice theory, to expand its explanatory capabilities to the possibility of interpreting groups up to the state. However, it can be argued that all theories created have not abandoned the ontological priority of individuals and do not allow for the subjectivity of the state. In particular, public choice theory excludes the possibility of considering the state as a rational actor. Modern adherents of the theory of political realism John Mearsheimer and Sebastian Rosato rightly point out that researchers of rationality have not been able to solve the problem of aggregating individual views into a single state policy [12]. A state decision is considered as a situation in which some individuals impose their interests on others, while no state interest is implied. The political regime is also unimportant: democratic countries differ from non-democratic ones only in that in the latter, instead of calculating the interests of the majority of individuals, attention is shifted to identifying the private interests of the ruling minority.

However, in Western science, within the rationalist tradition, there is a methodological direction that proceeds from the understanding of the state as a rational actor. In rational institutionalism as a theory of international relations, the behavior of states on the world stage is considered as the behavior of actors in the context of rational choice. In the theory of international relations, even such a term as "rational state" is widespread and recognized, which is impossible within the framework of public choice theory.

Thus, it can be assumed that the category of a rational actor is applicable to a state to varying degrees depending on whether there is a domestic or foreign policy context. If we talk about political relations at such a high level of generalization as the level of international relations, then it is acceptable to consider the state as a rational actor. This approach is quite promising for examining electoral reforms that were carried out under the decisive influence of foreign policy circumstances. As an example, we will point out how in 2005 the institution of

international election observation was introduced in Great Britain with the consent of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. The explanation for this reform can be sought not in the rational interests of Minister Straw or the Labour Party, but in the rational interests of Great Britain, since this step provided the state with a favorable foreign policy image and was beneficial for conducting foreign policy in developing countries.

The role of the state in borrowing innovations. One of the significant differences of the Russian tradition of institutionalism is the recognition of the special role of the state in the process of import and development of institutions. The domestic research tradition sought to overcome the installation of foreign theories of institutional borrowings on the predominantly natural, unregulated spread of institutions.

The consideration of the processes of institutional borrowing in the context of targeted state policy has as its natural consequence the exceptionally low popularity of rational choice theory among Russian institutionalists. The theory of diffusion and even the term "diffusion" itself also prove to be unpopular. In foreign science, this term is actively used even in relation to state institutions, in particular, within the framework of the modern theory of policy diffusion. However, in these studies, it is not the state that is considered as the subjects of borrowing, but individuals holding government positions. One characteristic episode occurred in the development of the Western theory of policy diffusion: in 2008, the American theorist Beth Simmons proposed to supplement the established typology of mechanisms for the diffusion of political institutions, which included such mechanisms as competition, learning and imitation (emulation). B. Simmons introduced an additional mechanism - coercion on the part of states [13]. This proposal meant a turn to considering the active role of states in the spread of institutions; it did not receive support in foreign science and did not change the direction of the theory of policy diffusion. In the Russian tradition, where the dissemination and creation of institutions is almost always considered a state matter, the concept of diffusion itself is not appropriate. Irina Rozhdestvenskaya and Vitaly Tambovtsev have vividly presented this feature: proposing the concept of "state import of institutions", they contrast it with the concept of "natural diffusion" [14].

The tradition of modern Russian institutionalism has created a special theoretical model for studying the active role of the state in borrowing institutions, which is fundamentally different from foreign institutionalism. Anton Oleynik named the state among the main subjects of innovation [15]. With regard to economic institutions, the arguments of many authors about the need for an active role of the state are similar. Natalia Miroshnichenko noted: "the main problem of the Russian economy is its catch-up position. In this regard, the most promising path is ... targeted institutional marketing carried out by the state" [16]. Inna Mayorova drew attention to the special effect that the state can provide: "special attention from government structures ... can provide an additional opportunity for the successful institutional transformation of society" [17].

The topic of the opposition between borrowing and cultivating institutions has received particular resonance among Russian institutionalists. The corresponding discussion unfolded after a significant scientific conference was held in 2005 and the article by Yaroslav Kuzminov, Evgeny Yasin, Vadim Radaev and Andrey Yakovlev, "Institutions: from borrowing to cultivating (the experience of Russian reforms and the possibilities of cultivating institutional change)" [18]. Although the publication contained the much-talked-about thesis that "reformers should not be importers, but gardeners," it should be emphasized that the import of institutions per se was not questioned within the framework of this discussion. The main message was rather the need to adapt institutional changes to national conditions. At the same time, the solution to this problem was again seen in strengthening and activating state policy with respect to institutional development. Proclaiming the need for "targeted institutional changes" and the application of "systematic efforts... based on well-thought-out... programs," the authors saw the state as the subject of such a policy and assumed state interest.

The thesis of "growing institutions" was first proposed by Georgy Kleiner in 2000: "the technology (of creating a new institution) can be quite sophisticated, stochastic and take a long time, like the technology of growing a crystal with given properties" [19]. The author of the term emphasized that, unlike the works of Joseph Stiglitz, which are similar in ideological content, the Russian concept of "growing institutions" does not mean preparation for the implementation of an institution, but reflects the characteristics of the direct process of transferring an institution. Thus, the idea of growing an institution does not necessarily imply internal origin and does not exclude institutional borrowing. In their 2005 article, Ya. Kuzminov, E. Yasin, V. Radaev and A. Yakovlev also named "import of institutions" as one of the three sources of "material for growing institutions". E. Yasin used the term "implementation" in his report, discussing the goals of growing institutions. The main participants in the debate on institutional borrowing and cultivation did not deny the process of institutional borrowing, but rather sought to emphasize the importance of complicating this process and the need for preparation.

G. Kleiner saw the meaning of the idea of growing institutions in opposition to excessively linear project activity. The stochastic nature of the process of growing an institution should ensure its natural implantation and acquisition of previously unforeseen forms in accordance with the characteristics of the environment: "the result of cultivation is the creation of some new object with generally unpredictable characteristics." As it happens in science, despite the wide popularity of the term proposed by the author, its main idea was not properly accepted by the scientific community: leading domestic institutionalists continued to indicate borrowing, spontaneous invention, and conscious design as the main mechanisms for the emergence of institutions. The idea of cultivating institutions in its original form can hardly be used in the context of studying state institutions and, in particular, institutions of state electoral policy.

**Dysfunctions and deviations of imported institutions.** In Russian institutionalism, special attention has been paid to the problem of the borrowed institution losing its original functionality after being transferred to a new environment. The idea that some institutions may be fatally unsuitable for import is unpopular in institutionalism and is not explicitly expressed even in the Russian theory of institutional matrices. Institutionalism is based on the principle of universality. Institutional theory allows us to identify two main reasons for the inability of borrowed institutions to perform their original functions in a new environment:

- ✓ Transplantation errors the discrepancy between the borrowed institution and the conditions existing in the recipient country, due to the incorrect selection of institutions or the incorrect choice of transfer strategy and technologies;
- ✓ Simulation is a deliberate distortion of the essential characteristics of an institution and a change in its functions in the interests of certain subjects.

The concept of "institutional transplantation" has received particular development in Russian institutionalism. In 2001, Viktor Polterovich first presented a complete theory of intercountry institutional transfer based on this concept [20]. It can be assumed that the popularity of the concept of institutional transplantation is due to the fact that it assumes that the borrowed institution complies with new conditions, but at the same time implies the preservation of its essential characteristics and original functionality. V.K. Lebedev noted that institutional transplantation, in contrast to spontaneous borrowing, is carried out "under the guidance of the federal center" [21]. The main difference between the idea of transplantation and the idea of cultivating institutions is not that the former implies external borrowing, while the latter implies internal origin, but that the idea of institutional transplantation is more consistent with a targeted process directed by the state. Transplantation is a "man-made process," as G. Kleiner noted. It is also important that the idea of transplantation is applicable to the process of borrowing state institutions. In this regard, the concept of institutional transplantation can be considered promising for the analysis of institutions of state electoral policy.

Russian researchers sometimes use the term "implant" in relation to imported institutions. With the exception of E. V. Suslov [22], there is usually no attempt to give a detailed description

of this concept. Sometimes it is used in a neutral connotation (in this case it is synonymous with the term "transplant"), but more often - in a negative one, in relation to objects that have become alien in the new environment. G. Kleiner even spoke about the possibility of using another term that would reflect the incompatibility of the borrowed institution to an even greater extent: "if the borrowed institution turns out to be insufficiently functional in the new environment, it is more like a prosthesis than an implant" [23]. Atrophy of the borrowed institution occurs. These terms reflect the difficulties caused by the contradictions between the new imported institution and the established institutional environment.

As a rule, institutionalists avoid talking about the fact that successful transfer of an institution requires its adaptation to the conditions of the recipient country. In this case, the very idea of transfer would lose its meaning: an effective institution is imported so that it changes the environment, and not vice versa. It is characteristic that, speaking about the correct policy of transplanting an institution, V. Polterovich sees its content in the fact that the institutional structure of the recipient country to which the institution is transferred must be prepared and changed. With regard to the borrowed institution itself, it is only necessary to make the right choice, that is, to find a truly effective institution. However, the question remains: in what form should the institution be transferred? Is it necessary to transfer the institution in its original form, with absolutely all the features that it has in the donor country? Or is it acceptable to separate the essential features of the institution that ensure its functionality from the non-essential features that can be changed to ensure the adaptability of the borrowed institution in the recipient country?

Practice shows that political and state institutions are almost never transferred "in their pure form", but only with some modifications. It can be assumed that the specific form that an institution acquired after its inception and which it has in the donor country is not its ideal and only possible form. The specific embodiment of an institution in any country, including the original country, may contain some random or unimportant features. Thus, the subject of institutional borrowing is required not only to correctly select an effective institution, but also to solve a more complex and non-obvious task - to determine the specific features of the institution that should be transferred.

The institution of the president of the state arose and existed for a long time only in the USA, but it is clear to us that the election of the president for a 4-year term is not an essential feature of this institution. The essential feature in this case will be a more abstract and flexible characteristic, literally absent from the laws of the USA - election for a fixed term. The subject of institutional borrowing can deviate somewhat from the norm of a 4-year term, without distorting the essence of the institution.

Most political institutions emerge and arise spontaneously; their existence is not the result of a carefully planned project. In order to borrow an institution, the subject of borrowing is required to solve an intellectual problem that probably has not been solved before. The content of this problem includes understanding the institution, identifying and specifying the essential characteristics that ensure its functionality. As a result, the subject of institutional borrowing receives an ideal, specific model that can be implemented in government decisions.

The inability of a borrowed institution to perform its original functions in a new environment is usually associated with errors in transplant policy. However, such dysfunctions may be the result of a deliberate distortion of the original institution. Subjects implementing institutional borrowing, obviously, almost always transform the institution in some way in their own interests. The problem is whether these transformations lead to the institution losing its essence and basic functions. A special case of such purposeful distortions is simulation. In the case of simulation, it is no longer possible to say that the borrowed institutions are dysfunctional: although they do not perform their original functions, they acquire new functionality. In the works of V. Polterovich, simulation corresponds to such a type of dysfunction as formal imitation, which leads to the emergence of an institution that is significantly different from the original.

Simulation of institutions occurs not as a result of their natural diffusion, but within the framework of state policy. The reasons for institutional simulation can be both internal and external. In modern conditions, states are experiencing increasing pressure from international organizations [24]. In the sphere of electoral politics, governments of countries around the world are forced to respond to the recommendations of international observers or individual influential structures, such as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the EU, the OSCE, etc. Since the end of the 20th century, dozens of international normative legal acts of a recommendatory and mandatory nature have been created in the world, which contain norms for organizing and holding elections. The prospects for regional integration, the conditions for receiving loans and international assistance, etc. depend on the implementation of recommendations. This is a powerful factor in the international spread of electoral institutions. However, the mechanisms of external international coercion ensure not so much the spread of progressive institutions as their simulation. As Christopher Hartwell, a researcher of institutional simulacra, notes, governments of dependent states strive to meet external requirements and gain grounds to assert that the formally required institutional changes have been implemented [25]. It is curious that leading Western countries often find themselves in a similar situation. For example, the institution of international election observation, which became widespread in developing countries in the early 1990s, was subsequently transferred to Western countries, but this import was rather formal, and some domestic experts regard it as an imitation [26]. The same is true for the institution of domestic election observation: having initially emerged in developing countries, after its consolidation as an international electoral standard, it was artificially introduced in many Western democracies, but is hardly functional [27].

The concept of electoral simulacra provides a promising theoretical framework for studying the international spread of electoral institutions over the past few decades.

**Conclusion.** Theories of institutional borrowing can be an effective explanatory model for studying a wide range of issues of international diffusion of innovations in state electoral policy. However, their application for these research purposes is associated with methodological difficulties that must be overcome. The limitation in the use of some of these theories is their fundamental focus on examining processes in the private sector, denial of the subjectivity of the state and state interests, and methodological dependence on the theory of rational choice. In Russian institutionalism, a promising theoretical and methodological reserve has been developed that allows us to remove these limitations and orient modern theories of institutional borrowing to studying the diffusion of innovations in state policy, including electoral innovations.

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#### ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

**Николай Владимирович Гришин** — доктор политических наук, профессор факультета политологии Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета, <a href="mailtru">nvgrishin@mail.ru</a>, Scopus ID: 56404250200, Researcher ID: AAH-4130-2020, <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581">https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581</a>

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#### INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nikolai V. Grishin** – Dr. Sci. (Polit.), Professor of the Faculty of Political Science of Saint Petersburg State University, <a href="mailto:nvgrishin@mail.ru">nvgrishin@mail.ru</a>, Scopus ID: 56404250200, Researcher ID: AAH-4130-2020, <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581">https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0850-7581</a>

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